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ABSTRACT

This discussion of the role of general education in community college programs in Ontario begins with an acknowledgement of the absence of a broadly accepted working definition of general education and an admonition to community colleges to accept the responsibility for providing students with a total education. Next, the paper proposes various elements for a definition of general education, focusing on its role in developing well-rounded individuals capable of coping effectively with personal problems and broader social issues. After providing the historical rationale for general education at the community-college level, the paper puts forward five objectives of a general education core program which were developed by a Harvard University curriculum task force. These goals are to develop: (1) the ability to think and write clearly and effectively; (2) the ability to appreciate critically the ways in which knowledge and understanding of the universe, society, and oneself are obtained; (3) the ability to view life and experience in a wide, non-provincial context; (4) the ability to understand and contemplate moral and ethical problems; and (5) the achievement of depth in some field of knowledge. In this section, the applicability of these objectives to the goals of community college education is stressed. In concluding, the paper stresses the importance of total education, of developing balanced programs, and of self-examination by college personnel of the extent to which they are attaining these goals. (HB)

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A. Owen Klein

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ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GENERAL EDUCATION

Owen Klein

Introduction

Past discussions at one Ontario Community College between the college administrators and representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities contained statements that the quantity of general education in various college programs is virtually ignored in Ministry reviews of program proposals and/or revisions. The given reason is the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes general education. Furthermore, the assumption is made that each college adheres to the "spirit" of the original guidelines for Ontario's college system.

It is this acknowledged "hands-off" approach by the ultimate political directors of the institutions which makes it imperative that the colleges themselves accept the responsibility of determining that they will provide the students with a total education. The colleges must not merely train technicians who not only miss out on important aspects of their existence as individuals in a particular culture at a particular time, but also lose the opportunity for upward mobility in their professions because they are not "educated." In Ontario there has been a dozen years of college graduates and the message is coming back that

the ingredients for long term success include a liberal amount of those extras we call general education, regardless of the variety of definitions.

Problems with Definition

There have been numerous statements which can serve as blocks in building a working definition for general education. All that is lacking is the recognition by any given college that it accept some principles which support the need for such a definition.

General education refers to courses specifically designed to afford students more effective preparation for the responsibilities which they share in common as citizens in a free society and for wholesome and creative participation in a wide range of life activities.

Another definition from the Encyclopedia for Educational Research gives us that element of education which:

> ...prepares men and women for a satisfying personal life, happy family and social relationships, and responsible citizenship in a free society, by acquainting them with our common cultural heritage, by helping them to integrate the subject matter of related disciplines, and by developing skills, abilities, attitudes, and the values which will enable them to cope more effectively with their personal problems and those of the society in which they live.

Possible criteria for including or excluding general curriculum is whether it does afford students more effective preparation for the responsibilities which they share in common and "with their personal problems and those of the society in which they live."

The Historical Rationale for General Education

The need for such education is distinguishable and identifable at the community college level. William Davis recognized this when, as Education Minister of Ontario, he set up the current college system.

> If the *COLLEGES OF APPLIED ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY* in Ontario are to establish social identity, ...
>
> (1) they must embrace total education, vocational and avocational, regardless of formal entrance qualifications, with provision for complete vertical and horizontal mobility;
>
> (2) they must develop curricula that meet the combined cultural aspirations and occupational needs of the student; ...

In the Statement of Philosophy and Basic Policies adopted for the Colleges by the Council of Regents it is clearly stated that;

> The colleges must be more than certifiers of skills and technical competence. The whole man must be considered. Each student must be helped to see himself as a part of society and encouraged to accept the responsibilities of citizenship. The humanities

must, therefore, play an important role in College life, and be applied to help the student to the higher order functions which are the goals of education: to face change without fear; to question; to imagine; to appreciate, and act.

Therefore, course identification, that is, whether to include or exclude courses, within the general education section of the curriculum could naturally follow from the specific intentions of general education and the objectives contained therein. Such identification is eventually necessary. A formula was proposed by the Chairman of the Council of Regents, N.A. Sisco, in establishing the Guidelines for the Development of Curricula in the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology:

> All programmes of studies whether one year, two year or three year programmes should include the study of general education subjects and specific vocational subject. All programmes should consist of a maximum of two thirds and minimum of one third of the subjects being studies of a general education nature, and a minimum of one third and a maximum of two thirds of the subjects studied being of a specific vocational nature.

A General Education Model

For those who are responsible for the design of our college's curriculum there are many models. They are not all, nor should they be, at community colleges. And before

we look for formulas like the above, we should look at some governing principles.

In one of the current curriculum reform efforts in North American higher education, a Harvard University curriculum task force has proposed a general education core program which is based on a rationale designed to meet the needs of the late twentieth century. This rationale is no less applicable to the students of our colleges, albeit our degree of emphasis and application must vary from that of a university.

In his charge to the Harvard task force, Dean Henry Rosovsky laid out the major elements of a standard to meet the current demands on education. I have set these out and I have attempted to show that it is not stretching a point to translate Dean Rosovsky's rationale into terms which are suitable to the goals of a community college. All the elements of our educational purpose are contained therein:

(1) An educated person must be able to think and write clearly and effectively.

This needs no further interpretation other than, "speaking clearly and effectively", might be added. Good speaking techniques are a major part of the education of the community college student who will do more speaking than writing in his or her non-research oriented career.

(2) An educated person should have a critical appreciation of the ways in which we gain knowledge and understanding of the universe,

> of society, and of ourselves. Specifically, he or she should have an informed acquaintance with the aesthetic and intellectual experience of literature and the arts; with history as a mode of understanding present problems and the processes of human affairs; with the concepts and analytic techniques of modern social science; with philosophical analysis, especially as it relates to the moral dilemmas of modern men and women; and with the mathematical and experimental methods of the physical and biological sciences.

It should be a matter of the degree only to which the college has its students understand human affairs, social science, physical and biological sciences. It does not seem reasonable that a college curriculum should deny completly a critical appreciation of life experiences beyond the purely pragmatic and the utilitarian.

> (3) An educated [Canadian] in the last third of this century, cannot be provincial in the sense of being ignorant of other cultures and other times. It is no longer possible to conduct our lives without reference to the wider world within which we live. A crucial difference between the educated and the uneducated is the extent to which one's life experience is viewed in wider contexts.

We must acknowledge the international aspects of our everyday life. In Canada, this need for understanding other cultures and other times is exhibited daily within the country's

borders. Our socio-economic structure is now and will continue to be multicultural.

(4) An educated person is expected to have some understanding of, and experience in thinking about, moral and ethical problems. It may well be that the most significant quality in educated persons is the informed judgment which enables them to make discriminating moral choices.

Here is a close parallel to the Ontario Council of Regents' statement which directs the colleges to use the humanities to help the student "face change without fear; to question; to imagine; to appreciate, and act." And when we speak of education as a means of maintaining our essential freedoms, we must remember that this extends to the fact that no one is ever free to do anything that he cannot think of.

(5) Finally, an educated individual should have achieved depth in some field of knowledge. Cumulative learning is an effective way to develop a student's powers of reasoning and analysis, and for our undergraduates this is the principal role of concentrations.

This final rationale is in line with the major goal of our colleges. We provide depth in a field of knowledge (and skill) not only for reasoning and analysis, but also, for action. It is the action aspect which can also lead us to stray from our total educational committment.

There must be some reaffirmation resulting in such a model for the colleges. For in our haste to be "relevant", "career oriented", "life long educators" who can promise "career mobility" and "mastery learning" by devoting ourselves to "applied skills", we could become these slogans that we seem to love. For sloganeering is dangerous when the slogan's primary marketing function is escalated into a philosophy. One of the colleges' new favorite catch phrases was once examined by Robert Hutchens, educational critic and former president of the University of Chicage.

> "Life lone education" seems to be proposing a series of refresher or retraining courses to be offered to those who may be or have been thrown out of jobs... They will undergo ad hoc training enabling them to do the job at hand until the next one comes along. But it will never be necessary for them to understand anything.

Conclusion

Some distance between the "trainers" and the "educators" exists, and like ancient warriors the two groups shout their rallying cries across the no man's land of the undecided and the uncommitted.

In many institutions battle lines have been drawn. It is necessary to erase them for society cannot win in such a war.

The colleges must establish themselves as presentors of total education and training beyond arbitrary formulas and evaluation of content by pre-fixes and course titles. More damage to the total educational effort has been done by self-serving labels protecting departmental fiefdoms than any other single factor.

Ironically enough, John Kenneth Galbreath, in a segment of the brilliant television series, Age of Uncertainty, noted that one of the roles of education in a democracy is to give people the skill to detect self-servers and the sense to resist special interests. Needless to say, it could be difficult to reconcile this role with some current practices within the colleges.

The ideal curriculum must have an axiomatic principle forming it which engenders a purposeful balance regardless of slogans, course titles and variously interpreted formulas. I have tried to identify some factors for which we are accountable, but it's a task each college must levy upon the people who are the college. If there is no awareness of the needs for some form of general education our robot-like isolationism of "career-oriented" programs will continue to lead to only partial "careers" in the true meaning of the word.

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